

Interview conducted on May 17, 2006

File 1

0:00:00.0

(It's May 17th. This is Diana Dwyer, and I'm talking with Gale Halverson during the trapping interview.)

0:00:08.6 End file 1.

[The first 10 minutes of the interview were inadvertently not recorded.]

File 2

0:00:00.0

(Ok, alright. You mentioned, I've got, I can remember a lot of it, though. [laughs] I can write it up. You mentioned you grew up as a trapper. We are definitely recording. You started trapping when you were five?)

Yes. I started trapping when I was five. Lived on a farm three miles north of Roseau. Of course, when you grow up on a farm, there's a lot of wildlife, 'cause we had a woods, about 30 acres, right across from there that they hadn't worked up or broke the ground or anything. So that was kind of where I'd go when I wanted to see wildlife in there. My interest started there, but actually I started trapping at my uncle's when he called and I was five years old, he called our place, and he told me that there was a weasel eating on the deer remains. So then my dad took me over there. That was in late November, 'cause the deer seasons at that time started around Thanksgiving. So it was close to the 1st of December. It was cold and a lot of snow, and I remember setting back behind—they had outdoor toilets then, and they'd put the remains back behind there in the woods. So that's where I trapped, and that's where I caught my first weasel. I sold that one for \$1.75 from a fur buyer here in Roseau, I remember his name was Elmer Huseby [?]. And of course I thought that was a fortune, and actually, in today's—the way it is now, that would have been. I don't know what it would have been, it probably would have been about \$30 now for a weasel, \$1.75 at that time.

0:01:48.2

Furs were good money at that time, and a lot of people—well, nearly every farmer trapped, or their kids, sons, daughters sometimes. They would trap, like, weasels or muskrats, some of 'em. A lot of farmers made extra income by trapping mink. Mink were a very good price at that time, too. I would say mink sometimes went \$25, \$30 for a male mink. And you can imagine how much that was back then. I remember one of the trappers told me that you could buy a car for 400-and-some dollars, a pretty good car, between \$400 and \$800 depending on what you bought. And trapped mink, one year enough to pay for a new car.

(That's when furs were really popular, women were wearing furs?)

Yes, and especially in the U.S. and Canada. Now, you know, it's changed, so it's Russia and China and Korean and Japan. It's foreign markets, but they're very popular there, like they were here back—well, like I say, that'd be 62 years ago.

(So you pretty much taught yourself how to trap? Your dad didn't teach you?)

Yeah. Well, they kind of showed me how to make the set, because I think I used a number 1, but you know, it was tough to set. You had to try and step on it to get the spring down.

([laughs])

Because you weren't strong enough in your hands to do it, so you stepped the spring down, so I learned how to set it that way, and then the jaws would fall down. They're not like the wolf traps we have now, with that Newhouse patent, really, on it. The traps out of Alpine, Texas were—you can't set 'em over your knee. You've got to step [chuckles] the springs down and pull up on the jaws. And once you get onto it, it's kind of easy after that, but there's some of 'em that have very strong springs. [laughs]

0:03:47.4

(I want to talk about being a teacher too. I know you taught for a long time and then were a principal. You were trapping during the same time?)

Yes, yeah. I taught for five years while I was working on my master's. I'd work every summer on my master's. I'd get done teaching and then go to three months of summer school. [chuckles]

([chuckles])

So it got to be kind of a grind, you know, because I'd usually get done and have to start shortly after again. Then I—once I got my master's, after about five years of teaching, I had taken one year off and went to Idaho and worked for the Forestry, and that was enjoyable, 'cause I went to every state out West fighting fires and then, of course, I was only 22 years old, and you really enjoyed that. You could take it because—I remember we'd start work sometimes at 4 in the morning and go till 12 midnight, and it was just unbelievable. You'd get four hours of sleep. I remember sleeping in the sleeping bag by the Salmon River in Idaho, on the banks, you know, and you could hear the water running and stuff.

But also, I remember up in Utah, we were up high in the mountains there, fire was up. And I remember there, they'd drop sleeping bags to us. But they were paper sleeping bags, and it would get so cold [chuckles]

([chuckles])

That sometimes first ones there, you'd try and get two sleeping bags so you could put one inside the other. 'Cause it got down, that one night, I remember, to about 38 degrees. We were high.

(Oh, God, it gets cold up there!)

0:05:24.2

And that was of course early June. It was early fire. Normally they didn't start the season till a little later. So that was interesting, too.

(Everything's uphill there, even when you're walking down a trail, you're going uphill, it seems like.)

Yes, yes, that's one thing you notice. It seems like you're always walking uphill, never downhill.
[laughs]

([laughs])

I remember that in Utah and Nevada and wherever we were, Montana. Of course we were based out of Idaho. It seemed like that. But it was enjoyable, too, 'cause you'd see mountain sheep, you'd see all different kinds of game, mule deer, elk, goats we'd see once in a mile.

(I saw a mountain sheep last week when I was walkin'.)

So that was enjoyable. But I took that year off. But then I knew I wanted to get work on my master's when I was still young enough, because, you know, once you're married, it's very hard to do, you have so many obligations. So that's what I did. I went every summer, and I'd get done here usually on a Friday and I'd start summer school on a Monday.

(Keep talking, I'm just checking.)

So that was four years of that, and then I reached my master's degree. That was nice, to get that done. And then I applied for a principalship. It happened the principal here in Roseau was retiring, and they put out for applications, and I applied and interviewed, along with some others they had, and ended up getting the job then. I had been teaching here then two years, six grade. I was in Thief River for two years in fifth grade, International Falls one year, and two years in Roseau. I enjoyed the teaching part, but then I wanted to get into administration. I kind of enjoyed that. For one thing, salary-wise it was better, so that made a difference, too, although I had to work at that time it was 10 months. As we went on, of course, it eventually got to be 11 months, so I'd have one month usually off and that'd be it. And sometimes then you had to go in for interviews if you needed to hire someone. But basically, you tried to get a month off and most of the time then I would just fish and do things, try to get away from everything.

([chuckles])

We go on vacation. We went to Yellowstone, I remember, when the kids were growing up. We were in Colorado at a trappers' convention in Monte Vista. Oh, and Oregon, we were in Bend, Oregon. We'd go lots of different places like that, sometimes. Family would go sometimes. Sometimes myself and another trapper would go. We'd just sleep in the back of a pickup if they had a bed there, and then we'd—

0:08:27.8

Sometimes a friend of mine and me, we'd take our sons. We'd go, I remember, to Nebraska and we'd have a tent and tent out on the ground. So it was fun, to get away and come back and then you're kind of refreshed and ready to go. [chuckles]

(Some place new.)

Yes.

(You said you really liked being outside. Was that the best thing you liked about your career? In trapping?)

Yeah, especially trapping. I enjoy it. I've been outdoors, like I say, since I was five. I've fished and trapped all the time, every weekend, and I'd usually save my personal days, when I was principal, I'd get three personal days. Teachers do, too, and I'd save those so I could use 'em for trapping when it was really crucial, that I'd need to get out, take a day. So I really enjoyed that. But a lot of days—you know, I had a partner all the time. He's 81 years old now. He did trap fisher and martin with me last winter, but otherwise he hasn't trapped that much. But he was very good to skin, and so I'd have him skin all the animals and a lot of times we'd trap together, too. He did that for years and years and years, 'cause he was a mink rancher. He worked as a custodian at one of our elementary schools, so that's how I got to know him. He liked to trap, too. So that really helped me, because you see, I like to be out trapping, but I didn't enjoy being up skinning, because it gets so late, and you get so tired. I usually got up at 5:30 in the morning to check traps and stuff before school, try and get back by 7, take a shower, be there by 8.

(That's a long day.)

0:10:10.3

Yes. So that's why, when I had him to skin for 40 years probably, nearly, once I knew that, and being a mink rancher, he was an excellent skinner. So that really worked out good for me. Otherwise I couldn't have trapped like I did, you know, because—I mean, you can't be up till midnight. You get too tired.

(You start making mistakes.)

Yeah. So I'd usually trap hard for two weeks, like for mink, and do that, and then trap sometimes in the winter. Well, I used to trap Canadian lynx when they were legal, too. I remember one year I kept two sets working, like, over Christmas vacation, we'd usually get a break. In later years, as you'd negotiate, you didn't have even Christmas vacation off, much, you know. But at one time we had the two weeks, and then I used to trap fox and coyotes and lynx and bobcat. We used to have quite a few Canadian lynx. I think one year I caught 21 when I was teaching. I kept two sets working. In January I caught six lynx in the two sets. They were a beautiful animal.

(They're reintroducing them into Colorado now, because they were gone. Now we're getting more of them in. Hopefully they're surviving.)

We don't have as many because the Canadians, when the price went up, they'd come in from Canada and some of 'em would be native to the area. I know up by hunting camp, one year I watched a female come up on the road and I was just watchin' her, I had stopped the pickup. She wasn't from here to that chair over there away. And pretty soon two kittens came out of the grass, cut little things, about this big, you know, cute as could be. I watched 'em then. And they of course had litters. At that time they would, in this area. But then when the price went up, the Canadians trapped them a lot harder, so they didn't come from the north up here so much. And then now the northeast has lynx. We have an occasional lynx. I didn't see a track last year, but I saw one the year before up north here, and I see one nearly every year, one or two tracks of Canadian lynx.

0:12:24.3

(You said the worst thing was the mosquitoes?)

Mosquitoes and wood ticks.

(Wood ticks.)

Wood ticks and mosquitoes. Wood ticks, sometimes—I guess I've had as high as 20 on.

(Oh, God!)

I usually wear light-colored clothing, because either the shirt from there, a light blue shirt and light blue pants, 'cause you can see the wood ticks so much easier. Otherwise, if you don't think about it, they can embed some place you don't even know they're there. So I have watched that. This year they've been pretty good, but some years it's unbelievable. And the mosquitoes, when you get into a swampy area where you're setting and there's probably a swamp close and sometimes in the morning there's no wind and it can be a fog or a light mist, and they can be so thick, if you don't have your head net on and a bug jacket, they'd eat you alive. I mean, you can't even practically see. The only thing about that, you get so warm from it, you know. [chuckles]

The other thing is the army worms, when they're thick. They hit about every seven, eight years, I would say. They eat all the foliage off the trees. So when they move across the ground, it's just like the ground is moving. They come and just—they're so thick, it's just a swarm, and if you're there—like, two years ago, I was making a set off of the popples [?] where the wolf had gone, and I was putting a set in, and all of a sudden those worms came out of the field. They were gonna move to another area to eat because they defoliate everything. I couldn't get my set in there because they filled up the hole I made to put the trap in. I finally had to just scoop 'em out and scoop 'em away and try and get it covered. And then that worked out, but that was unbelievable. That was the worst I'd ever seen 'em.

0:14:22.9

(I've heard the name, but I've never seen anything like that.)

Yeah, they go right up over a house.

(Oh, God!)

They can climb right up. Trouble is, they leave kind of a trail where they go, too, so you've got to scrub it, wash your house down.

(A slime trail? God!)

And nothing seems to stop 'em, they go right over a car or anything. And when they go across a highway, you have to be careful, 'cause sometimes if they're so thick, it gets slippery, 'cause they kill a lot of 'em when you drive over 'em, and the highway gets slick. I've seen that happen, too.

(It sounds like something out of a horror movie or something.)

Yeah, it's unbelievable. But you don't have 'em very often. And some years they aren't that bad. It's just a year or two sometimes that they're really bad.

(Like our pine beetle?)

Yeah. The just keep building up, and when they hit their peak, then they seem to die off, the moths, the butterflies that lay eggs, somethin' happens and they just disappear. I haven't seen one in three years now, I suppose.

0:15:26.8

(The depredation, the damage that you're usually dealing with, the wolves are killing sheep and calves?)

Sheep, calves, and turkeys, yes. Those are the three main ones. Here with have quite a few cattle farmers, so basically the beef farmers, they calve, some of 'em start in February. But most of 'em start, I would say, in March and April. I usually start for them whenever—their pay period starts around the middle of April, 'cause that's usually when the first killing starts, about at that time. But now we've got some farmers that also fall calf, and that gets to be quite a problem, too, because see, then, not only is it the pair of wolves, but the young ones are 45, 50 pounds a lot of times by October. To feed—say there's four pups and the two adults, and of course there might even be last year's with, too, two or three of those that haven't left. And boy, it takes a lot of meat, wow! It's unbelievable. And that's when they can kill calves. Of course, they take a lot of deer and try and take fawns. Right now, with the fawns being dropped, they do try and get the fawns, then kind of circle around, if they scare the doe off and start circling. A lot of times they will find the fawn. I've noticed a couple of times in the wolf scat, all I see is a little part of the black hoof. My feeling is, most of the time you never see, people never see, really, where they kill fawns.

(They just take everything?)

You just see the doe with either one fawn or no fawns, a mature doe.

The eat the whole thing, because those bones are so soft that they can eat the whole fawn.

(It wouldn't be that much of a morsel for them, either.)

No, probably when they're born they weigh 15, 18, maybe 20 pounds at the most. So sometimes they're a few days old and they grow pretty fast, with mother's milk and the green grass. They don't start being born here, most of 'em, till probably the 10th of May. And by then we have good green grass. So right now there's quite a few fawns being born, from now till June 10th, I would say about 90% of 'em are born in this area.

(We have 'em now. You said turkeys? You mentioned a rancher or farmer that had a lot of damage?)

Yes. Here around Roseau, like I say, Roseau County is pretty heavy into turkeys and has been for several years. They've had depredation with coyotes and fox and raccoon and badger. And of

course, when the wolves start, it gets to be a real problem because they can kill so many in one night. I know they've killed 300 in a night, and possibly more places. But the one farmer just southwest of Roseau here, about nine miles, he lost 3,000 a few years back. I wasn't trapping at that time for him, but about 12 years ago he lost 3,000 in I would say a little over a month. I remember Bill came up and he finally caught the wolf that was doin' most of the killing. It can be a real headache.

0:18:53.0

Last year I trapped at that farm, seems like, where they're nearly every year. I'm there now, of course, when I trap here, but I trapped three last year and I know there were still another one or two that took off. They'll move sometimes, you know, when you start trapping, and then of course once they sell the turkeys, then there's no problem with it. So yeah. And then sheep, we don't have many farmers left that raise sheep. We have a few by Greg ____'s area and through there and south of Wannaska. When they start killing sheep, it gets to be a real problem, too. Coyotes kill 'em, of course, and sometimes they call and it's coyotes, so I don't trap 'em then, because the state's predator controllers can trap coyotes. So I have 'em call someone or have the Conservation Office call someone that I know is a state predator controller. Usually you like to have someone with experience, because if you educate 'em, it gets to be a real problem, you know, with a trap that's a little bit too small and weak springs, they'll pull right out and it's just like a timber wolf, once they pull out, they get very smart, very crafty.

So then if the timber wolf's in there, then of course I'll trap it and try and catch him or snare him or whatever I can do to get rid of him

([chuckles])

Because they start killing, they come back about every three, four nights, and they'll kill quite a bunch of turkeys. But the sheep, once they start there, too, they come back pretty often. But I've seen the sheep, the sheep is real dumb, they're just like turkeys. They stand there and kind of look at 'em and the wolf'll grab 'em by their nose and flip 'em over, and they're eating them when they're alive. It's unbelievable.

0:20:38.5

And like the turkeys, the one wolf south of Badger, one of the guys came by to Polaris Industries in Roseau, snowmobiles and four-wheelers, and he came by in the morning early. They start at quarter to 7, so it was probably 6 o'clock in the morning, and he was coming from the west several miles, came by just west of Badger there, a turkey farmer there, and he looked out where the turkeys were, out on open range, here they have 'em on open range. A lot of places they're indoors and they don't have trouble. But on open range, he looks out there and here was a timber wolf sitting, and the turkeys were coming to the timber wolf.

(Like it was a dog?)

Yeah. He'd killed 29 then, 'cause when I went there later, then, there were 29 that were killed. But I mean, he didn't even have to do much.

([chuckles])

They love to chase 'em, but it's different, you can tell dogs usually chase 'em and cripple 'em a lot or pull the feathers out or break a wing, whereas a wolf grabs 'em right over the back and kills 'em. They don't leave many alive. They may eat two or three turkeys and that's all, eat their breasts out, heart, lungs, liver, that type of thing. But yeah, turkey farmers, they have a lot of predators that like— [laughs] feral cats, dogs, everything.

(Dogs I would think would be a problem. What's the most challenging thing about trapping?)

0:22:12.2

Oh, a smart timber wolf...

([laughs])

That's pulled out of someone's fox trap. They pull out of a small trap and they get real smart. [chuckles] I've had 'em where they've been trapped and you've put in a set and you don't know, and they'll come from behind your set, where you made it, [chuckles] and they'll take the scent stick, the scent, and they'll go and lay down a little ways away from it and lick it off or chew it off. [chuckles]

([laughs])

Sometimes I can catch 'em by putting a blind set behind, if they come back. But a lot of times they won't come back to that set, and they may hit another set where you don't have one behind. Sometimes, those, if you can snare, then you can get 'em in a snare. They don't get wise to those, usually, but I've seen some that have, too, and I've seen 'em back out of a snare. Not snares that I've set, this was in Canada. A friend of mine that lives up in Canada and was trapping, he'd been with me up here, 'cause they were gonna trap, so they sent them up here a few years ago. So in the wintertime, when I was off, I went with him, because he used to snare, and did it not as part of the provincial government of Manitoba, but on his own.

I remember we came to one set and it was a big wolf, a big male, this one. He came up to the snare and he'd put his head in and backed out, went around.

([laughs])

That was the first time I'd actually seen that, several years ago now, where they do that. I mean, if they can see that wire, they get smart to that, too. 'Cause if they see another one in a snare, it doesn't take a wolf long to get very wise. A dog is pretty smart, [chuckles] but they don't hold a candle to a smart wolf, as far as I'm concerned, the different things they'll do. The only way sometimes I've got some of the smart ones, if I can find where they're going, and if it isn't a deer trail, you know, where it's no use setting, but sometimes they'll take a short cut across. Or I remember one case out in what would be west of here quite a few miles, maybe 50 miles, the wolf, it was in September, and a farmer had thrashed the wheat and he'd plowed it, and we got a 4.5-inch rain out there, so the dead furrow had kind of filled in from the dirt and it was only about this deep.

0:24:56.8

Well, the wolves had killed a cow earlier, so they were feeding on it. There was two of 'em, and one was a smart one because they were doing a research study out of Utah and they had collared some of these wolves. They had trapped 'em when they were younger and they had traps on the grade. They must have had a dozen traps on the grade. Well, that wolf, he knew those traps were there. He got so smart, what he did, when he come to the first trap, he'd cut off and run the field. Well, it made tough trapping.

I could a female, one of the females, but that big male, I happened to check there, 'cause I knew they had traps there and I had traps farther down and he wasn't payin' attention to anything, no scent, bait, lure, nothin'. So I found, when it had washed in, where he was running that smoother trail in the plowing. So what I did, I just slipped a trap under his track, and I narrowed it off a little bit with a thistle and a rock, but natural, so it was real natural. That night he came and ran that trail [chuckles] and I got him.

(You got him.)

I shot him. And then they had just come from there, and then they asked about it. And they'd been tryin' to get him for three years. Well, you know, I was lucky to get him there on that. Of course then they took him and dissected him and stuff. But they hadn't been able to put a collar on him because he was too smart to go in a trap.

So somethin' like that, it's real challenging. You've got to try and find the right spot, and in the summer here, it's very hard to snare. I don't usually snare unless I can find a trail the wolves are primarily using or cutting through, because you're gonna get deer. We have a lot of deer, and some farmers say, "Snare, I don't care, I don't care, we got so many deer, I don't care [chuckles] if you get deer or not, just get the wolf!" Once in a while, occasionally I'll do that, but I don't like to unless I can find a trail. Snaring is good but to get the educated ones, but in the winter, I don't trap for 'em in the winter, so I don't do it, but I know in the winter it's pretty ideal, as far as I see when I'm trapping other animals, because I can see where the wolves have cut across from a deer trail to another one, and you could put a snare in and have a good chance of getting 'em. You want to usually put more than one snare, because chances are if you happen to get the alpha female or the alpha male, then the others will start wandering around, and it's just like traps. Sometimes you can get—I usually try and group traps together, because if you're fortunate enough to get the alpha male or the alpha female first, the others will start wandering around, seem to get a little confused, are wondering what's happening with their leader. A few times I've gotten as many as four at a time, and I've gotten three several times, and of course two. A lot of times you'll get one if you get one of the younger ones, the not-dominant ones, either the alpha or the beta, then the others, sometimes they'll just pull right out, just like that, after you get that one, and sometimes they won't be back for two or three months, it's been that long at some of the cattle farms.

0:28:20.7

(Do you know how far they travel?)

It's hard to know. They say a lot of times their range is up to 50 miles. But here it's not that far, because when you've got quite a few wolves in an area, they have to have a smaller range. But they do travel a long ways. Sometimes—where I was just on this last farm, you know, I didn't see a track of that wolf for 11 days. That was a big wolf, too, and I was lucky to get him. That

was just last week. But we've been after him for about three years [chuckles] and Jeff had snared last winter, from Grand Rapids, and John had snared the year before. But what happens, sometimes you'll get one of the other ones that's running with 'em first, and then of course they pull out.

(Long as they go away.)

They're smart enough to pull out. Sometimes it just works out, you get the alpha female, you get the alpha male, [sound of hand on table] and you can get 'em all. I was at a place in Strathcona last fall, right before I was done trapping, and they'd been there chasing calves, and they'd pulled the tails off of about three cows, and on four of the calves they'd bit into the ham, taken out a chunk. But they were able to vaccinate 'em and put tar and other stuff on there. Those calves lived, but if they hadn't kept 'em up by the barn, they would come up by the barn at night, they would have had lots of heavy losses.

0:29:58.0

So anyway, when I trapped there, I was just trapping on the township road right by the pasture there, and I ended up trapping seven of 'em there, all adults, no pups. [chuckles]

(I had no idea there were so many of them up here.)

Yeah, in place there are. So that was—you know, of course that's enjoyable when you get that many. A lot of times there's only one or two. Like, say, by Grygla, where I was last week, that wolf didn't come back for 11 days, and a lot of times by the time the wolf comes back you've pulled out, 'cause usually you'll stay a couple weeks and trap and then you'll move to another farm, or you're at two farms and you'll move again if there's trouble. I was there a little longer simply because there wasn't a problem. It's a place where we have a problem every year for the last—whenever John started there, maybe 15 years ago. And I would say I don't know that we've missed a year, that we haven't been at that farm, because it's located not far from the Red Lake Indian reservation. What happens is, a timber wolf or a gray wolf, it's one of the clans, they have seven clans with different animals, an otter, different things. Well, so they can legally trap or shoot a wolf on their land.

(Is this Chippewa?)

But this farmer lives only about two miles from the reservation line, the highway that divides it, so you see, you trap wolves out of there, but it creates a void, and they just move back in, because he has, like, 200 calves now and still another 60 to go, so you've got a lot of young calves after birth, which they really love, timber wolves, coyotes, fox. So you bring 'em in. [chuckles] It seems like every year I'm there either in the spring or summer or fall, or both, spring and fall. But he doesn't fall calf. If he fall calved [chuckles] it'd be big-time problems, because when the pups move in like that, and you get six, seven of 'em in there, wolves, total or more.

(It's hard to make a living.)

0:32:16.3

Yes, it is. You know, calves are worth \$700, \$800 now, when they market 'em. And boy, you don't want too many losses. Most of 'em don't have insurance because it's so expensive. Some of 'em do, and that helps. And the state pays, of course, the state of Minnesota, which is strange [chuckles] because the federal government protects 'em, and yet the state pays the farmers. But they hear about it, so they're the ones that get the most pressure, because it's harder to put pressure down at Washington DC [chuckles] than it is in St. Paul, Minnesota. So they do pay 'em, so they're fortunate that way. If they can prove it's a wolf kill, the conservation officer, sometimes myself has to do it, because the conservation officer is busy and they'll call and want me to check it. And of course, when you've had experience, you usually are gonna be able to tell if it's coyotes or timber wolves by how they kill and how they eat. Like, a wolf, they can snap that bone [chuckles] right off on a calf like nothing. So, yeah, it's interesting, really interesting.

(Have you ever had anybody challenge you when you were out trapping, like politically, situations?)

No. Up in this area, a rural area, pretty much, where I'm in, there's no real big cities close here. There's people that like nature and like wolves and everything, and even myself, I mean, I wouldn't want to see the last wolf go. As you trap 'em like I have, you learn to respect 'em. They're just unbelievable. They take care of the pups. They're like a family. [chuckles] Sometimes it's hard to trap 'em, even, you know? But no, I've not had anyone confront me. I've had a trap sometimes stolen, or you put up the signs, and sometimes I think young kids steal the sign, just to put it in their room and have a sign up.

([chuckles])

But not—usually the farmers know. I always ask the farmers if there's someone there that would be against trapping, especially wolf trapping, this and that.

0:34:34.1

Once in a while, I always talk with the farmers to know, because they know their neighbors, and once in a while, if you're setting, you don't want to be setting close to a neighbor's land, because sometimes they don't get along with the neighbor, so that's one of the problems you run into, basically, I do here. I always make sure that the neighbors, that they are neighborly with each other. Because if they aren't, I don't set close to that neighbor, where it could be a problem, just being on their land or being on the line. But basically, no one has come up and confronted me. Most of 'em here [chuckles] they like you trapping wolves because for one thing, we have so many deer hunters in this area, and the deer hunters don't have much love for wolves [chuckles]

([chuckles])

And yet that's what the wolves live on. To me, that's a natural thing. But of course, some deer hunters, it really bothers 'em when they find deer killed on their hunting area. [chuckles]

([chuckles])

They get excited, you know. I guess you can't blame 'em.

(Competing.)

To me, that's a natural thing, and when they're killing deer, they aren't killing domestic livestock.

(That's how they should be.)

Yes.

(What the funniest thing that's ever happened to you when you were doing this or handling animals?)

Oh, boy, I don't know.

(You want to say! [laughs])

The funniest thing isn't funny, it's when you get your thumb or a finger in the trap. With these traps like that, you've got to get those springs down to get that out of there. Usually it happens if you get careless, or I find if it's raining, and I'm sometimes setting a trap before the rain gets too heavy, and the trap gets slippery, sometimes you're puttin' that dog into the notch of the trap and you think you have it and you're turning it and bang! All of a sudden it'll go off. I guess I've had it happen about three times in the nine years. So it isn't too bad, but boy, it hurts, because even though they're spaced, you usually get about the knuckle of your thumb in they're, so you're right in there, so you're gonna hurt for a few days. [chuckles]

(Ouch!)

0:36:51.0

But I'm sure there are some things [chuckles] if a person could just think of 'em right offhand, that are funny. But most of the time, it's just people talking or stopping or something. Sometimes you'll get farmers that want to watch you set to see how you set, that type of thing. There's comments. I guess probably the interesting thing is, sometimes where I go to a farm and the it's the farmer's wife...

([laughs])

That shows you where to go with the four-wheeler and all this stuff, and it kind of always amazed me the first time, because her husband was probably working some place and she'd take off out there and you'd follow [chuckles]

([chuckles])

To go back in the swamp, to find that calf or whatever, see if it was coyotes or timber wolves. You find some of those farmers' wives, boy, they do double duty, in the house and with the cattle and a lot of times their husband's working a full-time job, too.

(They amaze me, some of the farm ladies I've talked to, they're doin' homework at night with their kids and doin' the books—)

Yes, it's unbelievable. And then out there with the cattle, and sometimes, you know, feeding them, they can't get milk from the mother and they're feeding them with the bottle, stuff like that. Boy, some of those wives really, really work. In fact, in Caribou, there's a place up there where man alive, they're out there riding horseback and herding cattle and calves and feeding 'em and roping 'em. You name it, you know? And they do it. And then in November, when they're done calving, they have horses, mares, where they collect the urine from it for cancer stuff. It's just unbelievable. I guess that's the thing that hit me the hardest, when I—in the years now that I've been out there, seeing this type of thing. Now I'm kind of used to it, so it doesn't—but the first couple years, it would amaze me what some of them were doing. It's just unbelievable. Strong and can do these things. I'm sure they could probably [laughs] you know, where you see 'em rope a calf and tie their legs up, I'm sure some of 'em could do that. Well, I know some of 'em—out by Fosston out there, where I was, one place there, both husband and wife or girlfriend, whatever she was, they'd rope the calf, put ear tags in 'em right off the horse. Both of 'em did. And then they'd go to small rodeos on weekends, Saturday and Sunday. [chuckles]

[[chuckles]]

0:39:42.0

(Those cowgirls are still out there.)

Yeah. And I mean, that's real life. It's not movie star stuff. That's real life. [chuckles]

(It's hard work.)

It's hard work, yeah.

(What's the scariest thing that's happened to you while you were out there?)

Oh, boy. [pause] I guess, you know, the most serious thing for me is releasing a bear, tranquilizing a bear, or even a bobcat sometimes. A bear, it scares me. I'm not real good to shoot the pistol. I guess a rifle with a dart in it would be better for me, because I don't shoot a lot with a pistol. When I was younger I did, but as I get older, I really don't shoot with a pistol, I shoot with a rifle, always. Even the wolves, when I kill 'em I normally shoot with the rifle, except where I'm back and I have to use a four-wheeler, I carry the .357 or the .22 pistol, or both of 'em. But basically, trying to get that dart in that bear where they're popping their teeth and growling, especially a big one that's maybe 250, 300 pounds, and you get and you go up there, take that trap off and they're breathing, you know.

I usually, when I have a bear, I get the farmer with me and I have him have my rifle, because a big bear, you know, you wouldn't stand a chance if you're right there trying take a trap off. One swat and it'd knock you right down. They're mad. They're angry. They're upset. So I usually do that. And then that way, then, once I get the trap off I leave it and go check my other sets, and when I come back, they're usually either gone or they're going, and then I reset. But that one is the most serious one.

0:41:33.2

A bobcat isn't so serious, but if you get too close, they're quick with that paw. [chuckles] They can do that. And I know one of the things, one of the trappers in Grand Rapids [chuckles] told me, a porcupine, he was gonna release the porcupine. He had his new knee boots on, [laughs] and porcupine is somethin' else. You'd have to tranquilize him, I don't know how you'd do it without tranquilizing. But anyway [chuckles] the release or whatever happened, and it threw the quills right into his new boot [laughs].

(Oh, no!)

It ruined his boots. And you know, the bad part is, they're not very thick, so it could go right through. You have to be careful, too. But I think that was the funniest thing when he was tellin' me about how a porcupine did that. [laughs]

([laughs])

Bobcats, too, usually you can get a catch pull, but you've got to be careful. Sometimes the farmer's right there and they'll go with, and then it's simple, because you can hold it away and do the trap. But if you're alone, you either have to tranquilize it or if you can do it with a catch pull, but it's hard sometimes to do. Skunks, I used to—oh, I guess, when you talk about one of the funniest things, it's kind of serious, but it was funny, I would usually walk up to a skunk, and when we could use the drugs that they had before—now I don't do it, because it's so strict on it that you have everything has to be written down if you use it for anything on a practically daily basis, so I don't do it any more, I just shoot the skunk. But I used to go up to it and you can kind of talk to it. They get pretty calm. You can take that needle and push it right into 'em and then give 'em a dose of it and tranquilize 'em. Usually I would just bury 'em and they'd be dead.

0:43:35.3

So anyway, I did that, I'd buried the skunk. I was resetting, and I happened to look to the side, I'd buried him not too far away, 'cause a lot of times a wolf will dig it up. So you like to have the tractor pretty close. I happened to look and all of a sudden the head popped up of the skunk.

([chuckles])

I couldn't believe it, 'cause I thought it was dead, you know. So I had to go over there with my .22 pistol and shoot it in the head before it got out.

([laughs])

But that skunk popped right up.

(Scared you!)

I just couldn't believe my eyes. Right up out of the ground. It was covered up and all of a sudden that head was up there, you know. So I guess that would have been humorous...

([laughs])

And also of course kind of serious at the time. It didn't lift tail to spray or anything, so I just shot it and buried it, because they make pretty good bait. Although in the summertime I don't like to have skunks out there mostly, because it's too strong. It's deadly in the wintertime for animals like coyotes and fisher and fox.

(They won't go near it?)

They will, they will go to it, but you want it kind of older and deteriorated. Whereas in the wintertime or, say, late fall, you can leave a foot sticking out or a little bit of the tail showing or something. Once in a while I'll do that. I caught a timber wolf where I've caught a skunk and buried it and then reset, but not necessarily using the skunk for bait. Here in the summertime, they don't seem to, because more skunks are shot by people and they don't seem to have the traction they do, say, late October, early November, starting then. Then they'll go over, 'cause they'll eat the meat. But now, they've got all kinds of meat of different things, young of the year, jackrabbits and everything else. Skunk, not that it's bad, but you don't want to monkey with it so much 'cause you don't want to get the smell on yourself.

0:45:39.6

(What's your favorite lure?)

The favorite one is that government lure that we had, they call it either Wolf Pack or Euwenta [?]. I don't know, someone in Idaho made that lure.

(Pocatello, probably.)

Yeah. To me, that was about the deadliest lure. If I had one lure to use, it would have been Euwenta. The second one would be Wolf Pack. The third one would be the 2000, 2001. I don't know what that one was, too, but that was one they made in the year 2000, 2001, also a deadly lure. Those three lures—what I like about 'em, they're mild-smelling. Wolf Pack's a little more like glandin, a little bit stronger, and the other one just reaches out, the 2001. It just reaches out. But kind of mild-smelling for summertime. I like lures that are mild-smelling in the summer, because it seems like it arouses their interest, their curiosity, but it's not somethin' that they necessarily are gonna eat. But they'll get curious and smell of it. This way, if you use kind of a flat set, combination flat set, sometimes with a small hole for your scent, just a stake hole with the stake that you have, or under some grass or whatever is there, a little rock, something kind of natural, and they'll go over and smell of it. That way it's easier to catch 'em, much easier. I don't use much for dirt holes. For one thing, people know dirt holes, and they could go over there and kick in it and see if there's a trap there. I don't like that, because it could be a child or a smaller adult. Not that they'd usually get their foot in.

0:47:29.3

The other thing is, if they see it, it's more apt that they're gonna steal it. But those three lures. I like 'em because other retailers that sell lures don't have that, so it's something different that every fox trapper hasn't used in that area. And that's what you try and stay away from, something unique and different. I usually buy lures and test them myself and try 'em, along with the other lures. Because you try and find lures that interest the wolf, make 'em curious.

(Do you modify your traps?)

No, that's usually done in Grand Rapids, any modifying they have to do, they find out there. Like this new group of traps that came a couple of years ago from Texas, double long strings, they wouldn't go back. They made 'em such a way that—when we set the traps, we like to move the springs right to the back because they set solid. You can have 'em out, too, in that type of a shape, like a triangle, but they could more be apt to step on that spring. So when you've got 'em back, you've got 'em out of the way and they can come from the side, from the front, and they're more apt to just step on the pan. So they have done that down there, and yeah, you have to modify 'em with chains and swivels. But they do that. When I get it, they come up from here. I just have to dye 'em and you don't keep it up that way. But I don't have to usually modify 'em. Sometimes—in fact, if a wolf breaks 'em, I don't even have the dogs. A big wolf can bend that dog, just chew, grab it in its mouth, and it can twist up a lot of stuff [chuckles] they're so powerful.

0:49:24.2

(Has your trapping technique changed over the years?)

As far as wolf trapping?

(Pretty much anything.)

Yeah, probably, because when you start out, for mink you usually use pocket sets, although I still try and use them, with bait, for mink up here, because when we trap it's cold and they go for bait, especially fish. But for land animals, I'd say it's changed from dirt holes that I used to basically use. In fact, when I trap fox and coyote, that'd be mostly what I'd use, because, you know, you take the young of the year, because they're the easiest and the quickest. And if there's a smart female, sometimes the males, but usually the female gets smart, 'cause she sees the pups caught and she gets smart. And I always leave it, because I feel it's good breeding stock. So normally I don't try and catch it, but if I do, I'll set another trap or two, where I see they're pawing off the dirt off the pan or off the jaws. Wolves do that, too, sometimes. [chuckles] I've had to clean it totally off.

Now I've gone more to the sets that you can hide, more of a flat set type thing, because for one thing, they're hard to see. For the average person, they can drive right by and never see my set, they won't know it's there. And on a township road, especially, I'll set township roads in some places, because wolves travel to get to the farm.

(So you do it on a road, not just in the fields? On the roads?)

Oh, yes. Actually, township roads that people drive. But when I have to do, of course, is talk to the farmer and then talk to the road patrol guy, the one that runs the blade, because otherwise they take your traps right out. And it's only happened a couple times that they've forgotten and usually they've only taken two or three, I've been lucky. But if you could have eight, 10 traps set on that road, like I would have, say, where I was in Stracona, a mile long pasture-wise, and I had probably 12 traps. I skipped an area right by the farm, because they wouldn't run that area, they'd cut through the pasture or wherever. But where they were running, and actually I caught all seven on the roads, in between the two ends of it on the pastures, caught 'em there. But there

you want that trap so most people don't even know it's there. If you had a dirt hole, you know, some of 'em that do trap or know somethin' about that, they would check.

0:52:08.7

(Have you—you don't have any grandkids yet? Have you taught your kids or your grandkids about it?)

Oh, my son traps some. My granddaughter, I don't know if she'll be a trapper. [chuckles]

([laughs])

She loves animals. She's got to hug and stuff. She's four. My oldest granddaughter used to go with me, but she was here some off and on, and she would go with and trap beaver and I remember I caught a small beaver in a Conibear and he was still alive, just a little one. And of course, bein' he was so small, we were trapping at that time for nuisance control, the department I was with, I remember I gave her my rubber gloves and she was holding that little beaver there. [chuckles]

([laughs])

It was cool. She used to go with when she was four and five, baiting bear when my son would hunt bear. She would go with then, too, and she would go with trapping mink, fishing, and stuff like that. A lot of times she liked to fish, when she was five and six. So she is gonna be 21 tomorrow.

(Oh, you're kidding!)

So I've got a young one that's four and now they're expecting one on September 8th, and they had it checked, it'll be a boy. [chuckles] So probably he will be a hunter and a fisherman and a trapper.

(I imagine so.)

Hopefully I won't be too old, so that they can go with. When they're young and go with, that's when it's the most fun. My oldest granddaughter, she could go through the woods, unbelievable. [chuckles] My trapping partner would say, "I can't believe how she can go through these trees!" [laughs] She'd fall behind, and she'd go with me trapping, too.

So it's something, it's different today, with I'd say students, so many of 'em are inside so much with videos and TV—

(—and computers.)

Everything else, technology. It's so changed that a lot of 'em don't even know what the woods and wildlife is, really.

(It's sad.)

It's actually sad. They don't even know milk comes from cows, really, some of 'em don't.

(They don't know where their foods comes from.)

Yeah. Your rural areas are a little better. They usually know about hunting and fishing. Like here in northern Minnesota, deer hunting, the first day is practically a national holiday. In fact, they don't have school, usually, one of the days, they take conferences, because so many of the students hunt that are probably from seventh through twelfth grade, when they're old enough. They have to be 12 and have their permit. I would say opening day of deer season, they probably have 250, 300 students gone from the high school. So they do know more about the outdoors here than they would, for example, coming from the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

(How do you think trapping and wildlife management will change over the next 50 years or so? Do you think it'll disappear?)

It's hard to know, because you're gonna have to have some way to control the wolves, and you can try everything [chuckles] all kinds of research is being done, I guess, different techniques to use, and maybe they'll find some technology that will work. But a wolf isn't dumb, and they learn fast, and like right now, where it's unbelievable to me [chuckles] how they learn to go under electric fence wires, double wire, two wires, and not that high off the ground, and the tracks go right up to the fence and then of course you get hard pastures so you can't see 'em, but you know they've gone in the pasture when they kill a calf or whatever. It's amazing to me. I used to see 'em go through a gate, where it was higher and there's only one electric wire. Hot wires, you can hear it click at times. But they learn to go under, to crawl under. And you know, the space isn't more than that high, and they crawl under. And also wolves, like, on turkey farms, if the electricity goes off, sometimes a tree will go down and short it out, man, they know as soon as that clicking stops, whether it's coyotes, wolves, I don't care, raccoon, anything. Wow, it's fast, amazing how they learn that it's not a hot wire any more. [chuckles] That's why I don't know if it can possibly change, different ways of doin' it. As long as there's cattle and livestock and sheep and poultry and turkeys, whatever, I don't know what they'll do. They've got to have some way to protect—unless they're gonna just pay 'em for all their losses and let 'em kill. But the farmer wouldn't be very happy about that. [laughs]

0:57:18.6

([laughs] What are the biggest challenges facing trappers right now?)

Probably because there aren't that many trappers any more and people aren't familiar with it. Some of 'em, it's just like it's unbelievable, that there's someone that still traps? It's like you're a thing of the past. [laughs] Some say from the past, which probably a person is when you get older. [laughs]

(That's why I'm puttin' everything on CD! [chuckles])

But a lot of times, even though you come there and they've probably been hesitant, when they start killing, it's a whole different story. It's just like trapping beaver. I've had people that are protectionist, want to protect the beaver, but when they start cutting the trees by their home or along the river or their lakeshore, wow, their attitude changes in a hurry. They don't want that beaver there any more. They try doing some things and usually it doesn't work. Only thing that

works, if they're gonna shoot 'em, and a lot of 'em don't want to shoot 'em, so you end up trapping 'em for 'em. I've had people that were probably not totally opposed to trapping, but they don't want trapping on their property or whatever who totally change. The same when the wolves kill their calves, their sheep, their turkeys. Total change. Most of 'em are already very aware of predators and so they're gonna call a conservation officer, call Grand Rapids, to the office right away.

(Do you have any regrets, things you would have done differently?)

You mean as far as trapping?

(Yea, career, I guess.)

No, no, I've enjoyed every minute of it and more. [chuckles] I mean, bein' outdoors, all the wildlife that I've seen over the years. I see wolves, I've probably seen 60, 70 wolves in my lifetime, and most people have never seen one, and even some of the farmers I talk to, they never seem 'em, that I've even killed for 'em. I'm out in the spring trappin' beaver, the geese and the ducks, and you see beaver, you see otter, muskrats, mink. I see deer, I see moose. You see everything. And you're out there alone. I like it when I'm back in more wilderness country, there's no one else by myself, and it's so quiet and peaceful. It's unbelievable.

(So does my husband. He loves to do that.)

It's just unreal. I never regretted a minute of it.

(That's good. You said you were a reader, and since I'm a librarian, I have to ask you: what do you like to read?)

Well, of course, I love to read about hunting and fishing and trapping more than anything. I read about the mountain men and some of that stuff, history that's back. But mostly it's history about the settlers, when they settled in and the problems they had. A lot of times it ends up with the trapping and stuff they've done and things. I enjoy that. Most of my magazines I get are hunting, fishing, trapping, lots of 'em. I enjoy that. [chuckles]

(That's my last question. Do you have anything you'd want to add?)

Nothing that I can think of. I think we've covered most of it. Go from there.

(Sorry I messed up the first 10 min.)

Don't worry about that.

(Although we did go back and cover it.)

[chuckles] As long as it's worked...[voice drops off and CD ends.]

1:00:36.0 End file 2. End.

Note Regarding Gale Halvorson Interview:

There is a discrepancy on page 7, 0:18:53.0. I called Gale on May 27, 2009 about the person and place name in the paragraph. The names he gave me do not match the pronunciations in the audio file, thus, I did not make the changes but left what the transcription as is.